Reflective Essay

For my senior honor thesis, I explored the concept of occupational feminization and racial/ethnic diversification in the legal occupation. This research was inspired through Chiu and Leicht's work (1999) on occupational feminization in the 20th century. I came across their work during my Sociology of Law class with Professor Grattet. I found their research to be very interesting as they focused on how a historically male-dominated field was changing with an increasing number of women. However, I saw lack of representation for intersectional identities such as mine. As a woman of color, I find minimal research identifying how race and gender interact to create new barriers for labor and wage. Therefore, I worked to extend Chiu and Leicht's framework by examining the consequences of racial/ethnic diversification within the legal profession. For this study, I conducted a quantitative analysis of IPUMS workforce data from 2005-2020, examining wage disparity, wage devaluation and economic recession recovery. To conduct a successful analysis and efficiently evaluate it, I had to develop my research methods. While my nine month journey involved many developments and challenges, I believe that I had three crucial phases during my research. I began with finding adequate census data, conducting a thorough literature review and learning how to code. The reflective essay will outline this three part journey.

I started mapping out my thesis by looking for databases I can use to conduct research similar to Chiu and Leicht's, who used Census Data from 1970-1990. However, they also used a Lawyer's Career Satisfaction survey from 1980, which was not available for my time period of interest. Even for the census data, I required a survey which categorized between legal professions as Chiu and Leicht only looked at lawyers, and not judges, magistrates or paralegals. This was the first challenge in my research process, as without an effective data source, I could

not go ahead with my analysis. Therefore, I decided to contact the UC Davis Shields Library after multiple attempts of finding a suitable open source census database. With the help of William Cuthbertson and Qian Liu from the library, I fortunately came across IPUMS, an open source database containing American Community Surveys (ACS). In comparison to other databases like census.gov and national archives, IPUMS gave me the opportunity to select and control variables. The database also allowed me to differentiate between lawyers and non-lawyers, which was essential to my research. Additionally, the lack of a paywall for data of this quality served my interests as an undergraduate student.

After verifying that the ACS data was appropriate for my analysis, I began writing my literature review. As discussed during our SOC 194H course, I started looking for literature through my model paper. Using google scholar, I viewed academic papers who cite Chiu and Leicht (1999). I found relevant articles such as Kay and Gorman (2008) and Dau-Schmidt et al. (2009), who extended the original research into the 21st century. However, as this was my first time writing a literature review, I found it difficult to find and evaluate research articles. Therefore, I went back to the library and asked William and Qian for advice. Primarily, they made me outline my scope and nature of research to understand where to begin the research. Consequently, I separated my literature review into three sections: feminization in the 21st century, racial/ethnic diversification and economic recession recovery. Each section focused on one major concept which allowed me to explore each concept in depth. In the end of the literature review, I connected the literature to address the intersection between gender, race and economic recessions to come up with my hypotheses. Qian, William and I came up with Search Queries such as (Feminization OR "Diversification") AND ("Legal" OR "Law Firm") and looked at databases such as HeinOnline, Gender Watch and JSTOR.

These search queries were the basis of my literature review. In the beginning, the queries provided me with general papers which focused on my overarching themes. However, I faced many challenges as I began searching for more specific research papers. For example, when I was looking into the impact of recessions on the income of women of color, the papers mostly focused on the 2020 pandemic. Therefore, I adjusted these search queries and forced it to focus on the 2008 recession, which I was focusing on. During my research process, I also realised that academics who examine the feminization of law in the United States focus are a small group. Most papers cite each other and the names often repeat. I used this to my advantage as it was easier for me to judge the relevance and accuracy of papers. I simply had to see if the paper was by a repeated name or cited by more papers. However, this also limited my scope of research. So I decided to expand my scope by looking into existing literature on feminization in fields such as healthcare. However, the differences in each profession made direct comparisons challenging. Instead, I decided to broaden the scope of my review to include research from the United Kingdom and other global studies. This helped me explore more research and extrapolate those results to a similar economy.

While my literature review comprised a significant portion of my research process, learning to code in R was also an integral component. As a sociology major, I never had to learn how to code. My only experience involves using Jamovi during my SOC 056 class. Therefore, when I started analysing my census data, I realised I need to learn basic coding either for R or STATA. With William and Qian, I explored both platforms and chose R as it was an open-source platform, while STATA required a purchase. For the entirety of summer and fall, I spent a considerable time learning the basics through online courses on youtube. I also approached the

data lab on campus and asked multiple data science students for help. While the literature review was a tedious portion of my research, coding was the most stressful portion. I strategically learned how to code to only know enough based on my requirements. Using my model papers, I identified the exact statistical regressions, tables and figures I needed. I also looked for courses and resources which worked for my learning style. For example, I realised that while youtube videos are helpful, I am better at understanding in-person. Therefore, I decided to learn from my peers and gain more information from them. I also went back to them for feedback and trouble-shooting. Despite my research being quantitative, this portion of my research did allow me to enhance my interviewing and social skills.

This nine-month research journey has been very special to me. What began as an interest sparked during a course evolved into an honors thesis. I navigated multiple challenges during my project like finding a suitable database or learning how to code, but I overcame them by seeking the help of my peers, advisors and campus resources. The library was a major resource and helped me immensely at all stages of my research. I learned how to persist and adapt to different situations as I juggled this thesis while preparing for my law school admissions and internships. I also developed my technical and analytical skill set. I am very proud and grateful for this experience as I am able to contribute to literature which represents me. I wish to publish this work in an academic journal and to continue highlighting the experiences of women of color in the American workforce.